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ABSTRACT

Although Mexican Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, their history and literature are seldom taught in American classrooms. A study of over 3,000 high school sophomores in the Southwest revealed that neither Anglos nor Hispanics were aware of the contributions of Mexican Americans. Incorporating Mexican American history and culture into the social studies curriculum should help to minimize both the cultural myopia characteristic of many White students and the cultural alienation that frequently contributes to the school failure of Mexican American students. Historical texts and topics selected for the curriculum should reflect the complex and dynamic nature of the Mexican American experience and the long presence of Mexican Americans' ancestors on what is now U.S. land, should avoid the "heroes and victims" syndrome, and should present Mexican American history as part of U.S. history. Elementary/middle and high school history texts are recommended, as well as resources to use in finding Mexican American and multicultural literature. Literature to supplement historical topics should include historical fiction; folk tales and legends; and materials that cover contemporary culture, the changing status of women, average people, biographies of famous Mexican Americans, and resistance to bias and discrimination. In addition to quality materials and an enlightened curriculum, a school environment that values Mexican Americans is essential. Eight characteristics of the multicultural school are listed. Contains 52 references. (SV)

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CHAPTER 16

Incorporating Mexican American History and Culture into the Social Studies Classroom

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Despite dramatic changes in nation's population in the past 25 years, the social studies curriculum in most U.S. schools has remained oddly static. Because social studies, in particular, constitutes the curriculum for dealing with such changes, curricular changes are needed to restore some of its original purposes. This chapter explains why Mexican American history and culture should be better represented in the social studies curriculum, analyzes issues related to curriculum development and the selection of instructional materials, and advocates school cultures that affirm diversity.

Introduction

Latinos are now the fastest growing and one of the least educated ethnic groups in the United States (Estrada, 1988; Broun, 1992). Mexican Americans make up 63 percent of the entire population of the group collectively referred to as "Hispanic" (Estrada, 1988). Over the past 25 years, educators have initiated many programs and policies with the hope of improving educational attainment among Mexican Americans and other Hispanics.

tional attainment of Mexican Americans, consider the following statement from Andersson and Boyer (1970):

> The failure of our schools to educate Spanish speaking students is reflected in the comparative dropout rates in five Southwest States. Anglos, 14 years and older, have completed an average of 12 years of school compared to 8.1 for Spanish surnamed students. According to the 1960 Census, the state of Texas ranks at the bottom with a median of only 4.7 years of school completed for Spanish surnamed persons (p. 6).

Unfortunately, not much has changed over the past 25 years. The following information was reported in the April 1992 issue of the *NABE News* ("Excerpts," 1992):

- The Hispanic high school drop-out rate is 50 percent and higher in most urban areas;
- Three out of four Hispanic students can't pass a math test involving fractions;
- Only 51 percent of Hispanics over 25 are high school graduates;
- Only 10 percent are college graduates; and
- 56 percent are functionally illiterate.

While much has been written about this tragic situation, not much has changed with regard to school practices as they pertain to Hispanics, in general, and Mexican Americans in particular.

Many writers assert that one of the causes for the alarming statistics (low school achievement and completion rates of Mexican American students) is the narrow school curriculum. The typical public school curriculum continues, in 1996, oddly as it was in 1968—homogeneous, monolithic, and ethnocentric in its content. It has traditionally ignored and omitted the histories of many ethnic communities, particularly Mexican American communities (Anaya, 1992; Banks & Banks, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Anaya (1992) refers to this situation as a "censorship of neglect" and argues that in spite of the fact that Mexican Americans (Chicanos)[1] constitute the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, their history and literature are still virtually unknown and seldom taught in American classrooms. Anaya describes the situation eloquently:

> The Chicano community stretches from California to Texas and into the Northwest and Midwest. But not one iota of our social reality, much less our aesthetic reality, is represented in the literature read or history studied in the schools. So damaging has been this neglect that its result has been that the teachers of this country literally cannot see the children of twenty million people (p. 19).

One effort to improve educational attainment among Mexican Americans is to replace the outdated school curriculum that is universalist and monolithic in its view of the history of the United States with a curriculum that incorporates, in positive ways, all the voices of our country. This chapter will discuss the importance of this effort with regard to the education of Mexican Americans in the United States and will focus its discussion of curriculum reform on the social studies curriculum in particular.

The chapter considers the incorporation of Mexican American history and culture into the social studies classroom around three topics. These include (1) reasons for teaching Mexican American history and culture, (2) selecting texts and topics for curriculum integration that accurately represent the Mexican American experience in the United States, and (3) creating a total school climate that values and affirms diversity.

Reasons for Teaching Mexican American History and Culture

Several questions are often asked by teachers and school administrators about *why* it is important to teach Mexican American history and culture in social studies classrooms. They include:

1. Who needs to know this information?
2. I don't have any Mexican American students in my school. Why should I include Mexican American studies in my curriculum?
3. Mexican American students already know about their culture. Wouldn't our time be better spent teaching them the mainstream U.S. culture?

With regard to the first question, I argue that the answer is *everyone*! Knowledge of the contributions, struggles, history, and contemporary life of Mexican American students is important for *all* students in U.S. schools; however, it is especially important for students who are themselves Mexican Americans or Chicanos, a point I will return to later in this section.

Banks (1989) argues that it is crucial that schools provide opportunities

[1]The terms Mexican American and Chicano are used interchangeably throughout this article. Mexican Americans, as well as Chicanos, are persons of Mexican heritage who now reside in the United States. The term Chicano has a meaning that is deeply rooted in the history of Mexico. It was adopted by young people in the 1960s as a symbol of pride and as a means of acknowledging and accepting the Mexican Indian side of their heritage as well as the more socially acceptable Spanish, European part. Chicanos, in general, felt that schools should place more value on the teaching and learning of Spanish and on the study of the history of their people. The term *Chicano* is thought to be more political than the term *Mexican American*, and writers in the field use both terms based on their own self-identification and personal preference (Tatum, 1990, p. 12).

for all students to learn about their unique ethnic heritage. However, it is not enough for Mexican American students or any students to learn only about their *own* cultural heritage and history. They must learn to appreciate and respect other cultural groups as well. Banks maintains that all students need to develop "ethnic literacy." Ethnic literacy is not a set of discrete facts about a particular cultural group. Rather, it is a knowledge of the role and function that ethnicity plays in our daily lives; in our society; and in our transactions locally, regionally, and transnationally. Ethnic literacy allows all students to understand their uniqueness, to understand the complexities of ethnicity and culture, and to take pride in who they are as people as well as learn to respect other cultural groups.

It has been argued that, in the United States, ethnic literacy is more important for dominant culture (White) students than it is for ("minority") students of color (Banks & Banks, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

The importance of ethnic literacy for White persons is that, in spite of the changing demographic situation in the United States, many people, particularly White people, live in neighborhoods that are segregated ethnically and linguistically, and they go to schools where the majority of students are also White. Further, 95 percent of the teaching force (for *all* students) is White (Chavez-Chavez, in press). In short, opportunities for dominant culture students to interact formally and informally with people who are linguistically and culturally different are limited. The study of the history and culture of various ethnic groups in schools is important if these students are to develop the multiple perspectives and ethnic literacy needed to participate in the 21st century (Córtes, 1990).

In view of the above, when people question the relevance of incorporating Mexican American history and culture into social studies classrooms in schools where there are few Mexican Americans, I reply that these are the very schools where this type of study is most needed!

Conversely, there is much evidence that the assumption that Mexican American students already know their culture, and therefore don't need to study it in school, is an erroneous one. For example, in 1987 I helped to conduct a major study of 10th-grade students in a large urban school district in Southern Arizona (Escamilla, 1987). It is important to realize that this school district is about 40 percent Mexican American and is located in a city where fully one third of the residents identify themselves as Hispanic. Further, it is only 65 miles from the Mexican border. One might assume that, in such a location, both Mexican American and White teenagers would have a thorough knowledge of Mexican American culture and history. Through the study I hoped to discover what high school sophomores knew about contributions to life in the United States that had been made by Mexican Americans and other cultural groups. Our study was informal, but

quite informative. We simply asked all sophomores in the 10 high schools in the school district to answer two questions. There were over 3,000 students involved in the study. These were the questions asked:

1. Name two contributions that the United States has given to the world.
2. Name two contributions that Mexican Americans have given to the United States or to the world.

The results of these two open-ended questions were revealing. First, 80 percent of the students, no matter what their ethnicity, were able to readily identify two contributions that they felt the United States had given to the world. Their answers ranged from television to the atomic bomb to democracy. Not surprisingly, the three most common answers were popular culture answers—rock and roll, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola.

Sadly, however, only 20 percent of the students in the study could identify two contributions that Hispanics had given the United States or the world. The students were evenly divided by ethnicity; that is, no ethnic group knew any more about Hispanic contributions than any other ethnic group. This study, again, took place in a city whose predominate architecture reflects Hispanic contributions, where popular rock singer Linda Ronstadt was born and raised, and where street names, school names, and the very name of the state are in Spanish. In spite of being surrounded by Hispanic historical and cultural influences, high school students in this area had great difficulty identifying (and identifying *with*) cultural contributions of Hispanics. Even more telling, I feel, is that not one student in the survey identified a Hispanic contribution as being an *American* contribution to the world (question #1).

I concluded from this very informal study that neither Mexican Americans nor other cultural groups had a good understanding of the culture, history, or contributions of Mexican Americans to life in the United States. Further, we needed to explore new ways of incorporating the history and culture of Mexican Americans into our school curricula (social studies as well as other subjects).

Many others have written about the need for Mexican Americans in the United States to study their own cultural heritage and history. Gollnick and Chinn (1994) argue that opportunities to see oneself in the school promote a positive ethnic affiliation among Mexican Americans (and other groups). This, in turn, greatly influences individual development in many ways, including life choices, values, opinions, attitudes, and approaches to learning. Others argue that positive ethnic identification improves self-esteem and that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement (Nieto, 1992; Córtes, 1990; Banks, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Conversely, other writers assert that the tradition of omitting Mexican

American history and cultural studies from the curriculum has had the effect of alienating Mexican Americans from schools and from U.S. society in general. My 1987 study seemed, in fact, to suggest that just such a situation prevailed among high school sophomores. Contrary to knowing their own culture, Mexican American students often become alienated from both the dominant U.S. culture and from their own culture as well. The Chicana poet Gloria Anzaldua (1993c) eloquently evokes this alienation in several of her poems. Excerpts from two of them are included below to give the reader a sense of the frustration of cultural alienation:

> To live in the Borderlands means you . . . are neither hispana india negra española ni gabacha[2] eres mestiza, mulata half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from; To live in the Borderlands means knowing that the india in you, betrayed you for 500 years, is no longer speaking to you, that mexicanas call you rajetas[3], that denying the Anglo inside you is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black (p. 96).

For Mexican Americans, the cultural alienation also includes linguistic alienation as described once again by Anzaldua (1993b) in her poem "Linguistic Terrorism." She says:

> Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.[4] We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestisaje[5], the subject of your burla[6]. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically, somos huérfanos[7]—we speak an orphan tongue (p. 293).

The above words are poignant reminders that one of the major reasons for incorporating Mexican American history and culture into the social studies classroom is to avoid the cultural alienation that has typified the experience of generations of Mexican Americans in the United States. Before these students are asked to learn to respect other cultural and ethnic groups they must first have the opportunity to learn to respect themselves, and this must begin with positive self-identity. As Anzaldua (1993b) says, "Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn

[2]A Chicano term for a white woman.

[3]Literally split, that is having betrayed your word.

[4]"Tongueless. We are those with deficient Spanish."

[5]A reference to the language of the Chicano being similar to the cultural heritage which is mixed racially and often referred to as Mestizo-mixed.

[6]Joke

[7]We are orphans.

comes before changes in society. Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (p. 87).

Thus, the most compelling reason for the incorporation of Mexican American studies into U.S. schools may be to erase the negative image that many Mexican Americans and others have of their culture and heritage.

In fact, goals for these educational experiences should include making students proud of their various cultural heritages. To illustrate what I have in mind for all Mexican American students via study of their own history and heritage, consider the example of positive self-identity related by Raúl Yzaguirre (1988). Raúl is the current president of the National Council of La Raza. Raúl says it was not until he became an adult that he realized the great cultural advantages he had because of his Chicano heritage. In fact, he felt proud of not one background, but of his three distinct backgrounds. When he moved to Washington, DC, and people did not know the difference between being Mexican and Chicano, and would often say disparaging things about Mexico, Raúl would proudly say, *"Soy Mexicano"* (I am Mexican). When he would go to Mexico and people would notice he looked "Americanized," and would criticize Mexican Americans as being "pochos," he would proudly say, *"Soy Chicano"* (I am Chicano). When he went to Europe and heard the critics put down the United States, he would proudly say, *"Soy Americano"* (I am American). He had come to know that he was enriched by all his cultural identities, and was no longer alienated from any of them.

In short, it would seem that classrooms and schools should strive to create environments that minimize the cultural alienation felt by so many Mexican American students and the cultural myopia characteristic of so many White students. Suggestions for ways to do this are included in the next sections.

Selecting Texts and Topics for Curriculum Integration That Accurately Represent the Mexican American Experience in the United States

Perhaps the most important element in the selection of materials about the Mexican American experience in the United States is diversity. The Mexican American experience in the United States is diverse, complex, and dynamic. No single definition or story characterizes the Mexican American experience, just as no single story captures any other ethnolinguistic group.

Given this diversity, it is important to define the Mexican American experience first and foremost as a human experience. Many identify its beginnings around 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, when

Mexico ceded a third of its land to the United States. This area today is California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and part of Colorado (Barrera, 1992). Others say, however, that the history of the Mexican American began in Pre-Columbian times (Tatum, 1990).

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mexicans who chose to remain on the ceded land became the Mexican Americans. Domination and subordination characterized the subsequent experiences of the various Mexican groups. For persons teaching Mexican American history, it is important that they know that many Mexican Americans have been here for generations, while others will be arriving today. Social studies classes incorporating Mexican American history must be aware of each of these realities.

It is important also to note that there are many materials currently available to teach about Mexican American culture and history. However, as Banks and Banks (1989) have noted, many of these materials limit their presentation of the Mexican American experience to the discussion of isolated holidays and events such as the *16 de septiembre* (Mexican Independence Day) and *5 de mayo* (an important holiday in Mexico commemorating the beginning of the victory of Mexico over the French who were occupying Mexico in 1862).

Further, these same materials tend to present historical figures in two extremes. One extreme is the "hero" presentation which describes a few exceptional historical figures as superhumans who overcame insurmountable odds to achieve greatness. More often though, social studies curricula depict the Mexican American people as helpless victims of poverty and discrimination.

The dichotomy of heroes and victims produces a distorted account of the Mexican American experience. Perpetuating the stereotypes of Mexican Americans as victims is harmful to all students in a classroom, but poses special dangers to students of Mexican American heritage. The view that only the exceptional succeed while the majority fall victim—combined with the sporadic and inaccurate treatment of the contributions of Mexican Americans in the curriculum—may lead students to conclude that if they are not truly exceptional (and most of us are not!), then there is no hope for them, unless they reject their heritage and learn to "act White." Further, students may be misled to conclude that their heritage has contributed very little to the development of the Western Hemisphere.

The heroes and victims syndrome of the presentation of the Mexican American experience has the potential of leaving students with few realistic role models. Most students are not likely to achieve the greatness of a Caesar Chávez, nor will they likely live in a state of abject poverty. Many students will find it difficult to identify with Mexican American culture as presented in most social studies curriculum. The result is a conceptual

vacuum that defeats one of the main purposes of integrating Mexican American studies into the curriculum—to develop a sense of ethnic pride.

So how do we select materials and choose topics to incorporate Mexican American history and culture into the social studies curriculum in a way that does not focus solely on discrete historical events, token contributions, famous people, or hopelessness?

I offer the following guidelines for incorporating materials about Mexican American history and culture into the social studies curriculum. First, these collections should include the range of Mexican American history and not be limited to contemporary history or the history of "Westward Expansion." (At present, the latter two conditions, and not the former, prevail.) Second, Mexican American history is American history, and it should be presented together with traditional topics in U. S. history. Third, school classrooms and libraries should have collections of books and materials (trade books as well as textbooks) that represent the Mexican American diaspora (i.e., immigrant and emigrant populations) and range of experiences and viewpoints.

Significant eras in Mexican American history are presented below; these eras need to be represented in social studies textbooks dealing with general American history. The discussion also provides a list of texts and materials that can be used by teachers to inform themselves about Mexican American history so that they can then create integrated lessons. These eras need to be taught at both elementary and secondary levels. This list of resources is by no means exhaustive but is offered as a way of encouraging teachers to learn more about Mexican American history and to begin to consider ways to integrate Mexican American history without making it a separate subject in an already crowded curriculum.

Major Eras In Mexican American History

- Pre-Columbian History (prior to 1492)
- Spanish and Mexican Periods (1528-1848)
- Mexican American Period (1848-1960)
- Contemporary Period - The Civil Rights Era (1960-present)

Textbooks and other materials useful to teachers attempting to incorporate this history into the social studies curriculum include the following:

Elementary/Middle History Texts

Hispanics in America to 1776. (1993). Paramus, NJ: Globe Book Co.
Hispanics in the U.S. (1989). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Book Co.
Hispanics in U.S. history. (1983). Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.

Pinchot, J. (1973). *The Mexican Americans in America.* Minneapolis, MN: The Learner Co.

The Latin experience in U.S. history. (1994). Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon.

High School History Texts

Acuña, R. (1988). *Occupied America: A history of Chicanos* (3rd ed). New York: Harper & Row.

Chávez, J. (1984). *The lost land: The Chicano image of the Southwest.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Moore, J. (1976). *Mexican Americans.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Nova, J. (1973). *The Mexican American in American history.* New York: American Book Co.

500 years of Chicano history in pictures. (1992). Albuquerque, NM: Southwest Organizing Project.

Literature

With regard to materials selection that includes literature to represent the Mexican American diaspora and multiple experiences, I suggest that social studies texts be supplemented with literature for children and adolescents. The history of a people cannot be separated from their literature, stories, and poetry. In fact, the inclusion of these stories in the curriculum is crucial to accurate portrayal of Mexican American people and their history. Literature helps make history "come alive." Fortunately, during the past few years, several excellent resource books have been produced for teachers to use in finding literature that represents the broad range of experiences in the Mexican American culture. These resources include but are not limited to the following:

Harris, V. (Ed.). (1992). *Multicultural literature in grades K-8.* Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon Pub.

Latino poetry. (1994). Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon.

Mexican American literature. (1993). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Book Co.

Ramírez, G., & Ramírez, J. (1994). *Multiethnic children's literature.* Albany, NY: Delmar.

Tatum, C. (Ed.) (1990). *Mexican American literature.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich.

Using the above resources and others, it is now possible for both elementary and secondary teachers to integrate Mexican American heritage into the social studies curriculum through literature as well as through textbook topics. With such resources, teachers can expand their presentation of the treatment of Mexican Americans beyond heroes and victims

(heroes and victims are also important, too, but as a part of this literature and not in isolation). Types of literature needed to supplement the historical topics listed above are described below, with several examples.

Historical fiction. Historical fiction can be used to supplement all the historical topics listed, from the stories of fifth-generation Mexican Americans to the stories of first-generation Mexican Americans. For example, the book *Kids Explore America's Hispanic Heritage* (1992) presents stories about people like Casimiro Barela, who was born before the Mexican American war in 1848 and who helped to write the Colorado Constitution; and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez, a contemporary writer and civil rights activist who can trace his heritage in the United States back four generations. Other books, such as *Lupita Mañana* (Beatty, 1981), present stories about the contemporary struggles of recent arrivals who are undocumented workers.

Folk tales and legends. As with historical fiction, folktales and legends can help to provide a human side to the study of historical topics. Further, folktales and legends provide an interesting and stimulating tool for comparing and contrasting cultural viewpoints. Stories such as *La Llorona* (Hayes, 1987), *The Farolitos of Christmas* (Anaya, 1987), *The Moon God of the Maya/El Dios Maya de la Luna* (1983), and *The Sweethearts/Los Novios* (1983) provide interesting ways to illustrate within-group diversity and enrich social studies lessons. These last two items are not commercially available materials, incidentally.[8] They were developed, in all probability, as a local effort. Developing folktales and legends in this way can help forge links between schools and communities.

Contemporary culture, including the changing status of women. If students are to understand culture truly, they must learn that cultures are continually changing. Contemporary stories help to illustrate the changing nature of the Mexican American culture. Their use can help social studies teachers reduce the "folksy" treatment that many cultural groups receive in social studies textbooks. Books such as Soto's *Taking Sides* (1990) or Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* (1983) present stories that relate to "real people" living in the contemporary United States and the cultural struggles that contemporary Mexican Americans face. Other books, such as Atkinson's *Mar a Teresa* (1979), are also important in their presentation of the changing circumstances of Mexican American women in the United States. For

[8]*El Dios Maya de la Luna* and *Los Novios* are available on request from Kathy Escamilla, School of Education, University of Colorado at Denver, Campus Box 106, P. O. Box 173364, Denver, CO 80217-3364. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (two first-class stamps).

example, in *Mar a Teresa*, the mother is a graduate student who moves from New Mexico to Ohio to pursue a degree.

Real people. In any social studies class, particularly those with historical foci, the "real people" stories are important ways of illustrating how average people live in particular points of time. But equally important is their use to show the diversity of "average experience" between and within different cultural groups. Stories such as Lomas-Garza's *Family Pictures* (1990), Soto's *Baseball in April* (1990), and Bruin's *Rosita's Christmas Wish* (1985) present "people stories" that students from many cultural groups can understand and appreciate.

Heroes and heroines. As stated previously, the inclusion of heroes in the study of Mexican American heritage is problematic if the study of heroes represents the entire treatment of Mexican American culture. However, the study of heroes and heroines is a feature of a balanced curriculum. Mexican Americans have made significant contributions to U.S. history and deserve recognition for their work. Stories about heroes and heroines should be chosen to fit the appropriate period of history being studied so that topics are presented in an integrated way. Fortunately there are many such books. Examples include Clinton's *Everett Alvarez Jr.: A Hero for Our Times* (1990), which is a story of the first American pilot shot down over North Vietnam who also became the first POW in 1964. Similarly, Munson's book, *Our Tejano Heroes: Outstanding Mexican Americans in Texas* (1989), provides short biographies of historical and contemporary figures who have contributed in significant ways to the history of Texas.

Victims and discrimination. As with heroes and heroines, reading about discrimination visited upon Mexican Americans is important to a complete understanding of the history of this group. And a complete understanding of the Mexican American experience is important if students are to become active agents in the continuing quest for social justice in the United States. However, as with heroes and heroines, topics of discrimination and victimization should be presented as a *part* of the Mexican American experience (and one American experience), but not its entirety. Books such as de Ruiz's *La Causa: The Farmworkers' Story* (1993), Anzaldua's *Friends From the Other Side* (1993a), and Tafolla's *Sonnets to Human Beings* (1992) are wonderful classroom collections, not only because they present stories of victimization, but also because they simultaneously illustrate the heroism so often involved in resisting or coping with discrimination.

Used with an integrated presentation of Mexican American history, literature powerfully and positively incorporates Mexican American issues

into social studies classrooms. The use of literature also honors the fact that literature and history depend on one another.

One cannot hope, however, to create positive ethnic pride and instill respect and appreciation for the Mexican American culture by simply changing the social studies curriculum. Classrooms are microcosms of larger school environments (just as schools are microcosms of communities). True integration cannot really succeed unless the entire school environment affirms and honors the Mexican American culture and the students and families who represent that culture. Students need visible symbols of Mexican American culture and heritage, schoolwide, every day.

Creating a School Climate that Appreciates Diversity

Student attitudes about school and their sense of self are shaped by what happens both in the classroom and throughout the school. The benefits of effectively incorporating Mexican American history and culture into classroom instruction will be diluted unless the school as a whole appreciates not only the Mexican American culture but also the living, breathing, speaking students who represent that culture *because they are that culture* (Banks & Banks, 1989).

Changing a curriculum does not necessarily change a school. To illustrate this point, let us consider the following example. Teachers in the high school where I did my 1987 study (Escamilla, 1987) were often heard making comments such as, "I love living in the Southwest—the architecture is great, the lifestyle is wonderful." This same school also had cultural activities, a ballet folklórico dance group, a Spanish club, and a MESA club for Hispanic students who were interested in careers in engineering. Further, they also had a social studies curriculum that reflected Mexican American contributions. Yet in this school, when teachers described the Mexican American students, they often made statements such as they are "at-risk," "not competitive," "not future oriented," "have families that don't value education," and are, in general, "problems." Researchers in this area describe such attitudes as valuing *"lo mexicano"* (Mexican things), but not *"los mexicanos"* (Mexican people) (Paz, 1987). Students can expect to make few gains in a school environment that purports to value their culture (in the abstract) while at the same time disdains them as human beings.

For these reasons, any attempt at creating an environment that affirms diversity must consider the larger environment as well as the curriculum. Banks (1989) has identified eight characteristics of a multicultural school. These include three issues that could be viewed as issues to be addressed inside a classroom and five that could be viewed as larger school issues.

The characteristics are as follows:

1. The teachers and school administrators have positive attitudes toward all students, and they respond to them in positive and caring ways.
2. The formalized curriculum reflects the experiences, cultures, and perspectives of a range of cultural and ethnic groups as well as both genders.
3. The teaching styles used by the teachers match the learning, cultural, and motivational styles of the students.
4. The school environment shows respect for the students' first languages and dialects.
5. The instructional materials used in the school show events, situations, and concepts from the perspectives of a range of cultural, ethnic, and racial groups.
6. The assessment and testing procedures used in the school are culturally sensitive, and students of color participate in gifted and honors classes at a proportional rate.
7. The school culture and the informal curriculum reflect cultural and ethnic diversity.
8. The school counselors have high expectations for students from different racial, ethnic, and language groups and help these students to set and realize positive career goals.

Banks' list has been further supported by researchers specifically studying Mexican Americans (Tikunoff, 1984; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). The above list of characteristics and others like it demonstrate that real improvement results from changing schools and their attitudes as well as changing curriculum.

Integrating Mexican American history and culture into the social studies classroom is a worthy and important goal for all schools—especially those with large populations of Mexican American students. Effective integration requires that teachers have accurate materials that represent the diversity of the Mexican American experience and the broad range of contributions that Mexican Americans have made to life in the Western Hemisphere. Further, this study should motivate children and youth not only for learning but for positive social change on behalf of the common good.

However, quality materials and enlightened curricula will have little impact in schools where the environment is still alien or hostile to the very students such schools purport to help. Therefore, creating a school environment that values Mexican American students is essential. To truly incorporate Mexican American history and culture into the curriculum requires that the entire school and all its teachers and staff take individual responsibility in learning to teach in new ways and with new perspectives. As educators, we are professionally responsible for entering different existential worlds in order to enrich ourselves and our teaching and to serve as models for

others. This enrichment lies at the heart of pluralism and excellence, and it illumines the search for equity and social justice. Nothing less will create meaningful change.

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